

# THE CEA CRITIC

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## A WREATH FOR NOAH WEBSTER

(A paper read to the Fall Meeting of the American Studies Association of Michigan, Ypsilanti, Michigan, December 6, 1958.)

It is with some diffidence that one introduces the subject of linguistic study before a gathering of literary scholars and historians, even through the back door of an appreciation of Noah Webster during the 200th year since his birth. For while our own is a period of efflorescence in language studies, a renaissance, even, in which America has attained that pre-eminence that Webster dreamed for it, the general attitude toward linguistics of those whose behavior is mainly verbal behavior is more medieval than modern—a dependence on authority and on authorities dead and gone, on the dictionary and on the grammar, that makes Webster himself sound even more than in his own day like a heretic and a radical.

"The more I reflect on the subject," he wrote, "the more I am convinced that a living language admits of no fixed state, nor of any certain standard of pronuncia-

tion by which even the learned in general will consent to be governed . . . the bulk of the nation . . . regulate, and forever will regulate, their practice by a decided preference of sounds—that is, by what may be termed *natural accent*. To oppose this popular preference of a natural, easy English accent is as fruitless as it is destructive of the uniformity of pronunciation and the beauties of speaking."

Hence it is that as we approach Noah Webster's monument in order to honor him as the schoolmaster of America, we may have to remove a dead cat or two inadvertently placed there, perhaps by Prof. Arthur Bestor and his friends, such as this: "Our educational system is contributing in many ways to the weakening of English: . . . above all it seems to us that the trouble comes from the fact that the official guardians of English in the schools are largely persons who do not believe there is any body of correct English that deserves to be perpetuated from generation to generation."

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## TEACHING IN JAPAN

As of now, I have been four months in Japan, and in that time I've been not merely an interested observer, I've been a fascinated observer of the Japanese educational system. I do not think, for a moment, that four months qualifies me as an expert, even though most of my time and energy are spent at a good vantage point: as a teacher of American literature in two universities. Here I catch glimpses of the staff, the administration, and the students, and I shall have the boldness to make some remarks about all three groups, while I pray that these comments may never leak back to individuals shadowed herein. I am not intending to talk about individuals, really; rather to talk about ideas, that produce systems—and to hold these systems up for implied comparison with what I know about American educational systems.

Shall we start with the staff first? I've met some scientists and engineers—a psychologist or two, a sociologist, a physician—and all of these men have had a year or more in America and have kept a ready interest in American things.

A far larger group than they are my fellow teachers of English, many of whom have also studied in America, who divide themselves into three groups, academically speaking. The first are the linguists, the

second are the teachers of composition, or conversation, or business English, the third are the teachers of literature—be it English or American.

At both of the universities where I teach the linguists are the strongest group. They owe their intellectual allegiance to Germanic linguistics if they are over fifty; and to the University of Michigan if they are younger. They are very keen-minded and well-disciplined; they are quick to spot shades of difference in idioms or in syntax, and to seek earnestly for reasons for these differences.

The thing that shocks me, however, is that they themselves are quite shy about speaking English, that they rather object to conducting classes in English, and that, for some of them, English is a sort of written puzzle, to be worked out word by word. Chaucer is no more or less difficult than Smollett, or Faulkner, or Beowulf: all of it is, wouldn't you say, English?

The next group are the teachers of conversation or of composition. (Let's lump Business English into this category—and ignore its necessarily more vocational aims.) They too are worthy and hard working. Almost everyone in Japan wants to learn to speak English—or he thinks he does. All of

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## "DOCTOR ZHIVAGO" IN THE CLASSROOM

If a book has received the praises that *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak has, the teachers of humanities courses may have their day and ask whether it ought to be "enskied" in the usual humanities or world literature course given on the sophomore level. Because my answer will be a tentative "yes," I would like to speak of the problems that this excellent work raises and the high demands it makes upon the reader, and leave the question of its rightful company with Homer, Dante and Shakespeare to another generation.

As everyone by now knows, it is a highly ambitious, complex, "big" novel deserving careful study. Its subject is the fate of people and, equally important, the fate of a man caught in chaos—his tiny part in championing that chaos and his determination to preserve a vestige of life despite it.

The Russian revolution, with its gathering momentum in the First World War and with its aftermath, holds the center of the stage but is never in full focus. We hear only distant sounds of events at the upper echelons, and yet, as Pasternak says of Zhivago's poetry, "things scarcely named in the lines evoke concrete images."

What we see is the relentless unwinding of raggedy energy and the piecemeal havoc that ensues: people scurrying for food and warmth, forced into strange new roles, slipping into hardships with a gambler's faith in some odds somewhere—one's own resourcefulness, the infinite land.

Pasternak sees the revolution as a titanic happening whose origins "it is petty to explore" and that does not end when it is, officially, over. It has a mystique of its own, perhaps that of an apocalyptic miracle. We see it in expressionistic glimpses: from the enthusiastic but rational support that Zhivago's saintly uncle gives it, from the commitment to something "socially useful" that Zhivago himself makes when he chooses the medical profession, from the belief in violence that propels a railroad worker's son into a masochistic automation.

We see it recasting the loyalties of nearly all; we see distinctions between victim and executioner, Red and White, rich and poor swallowed up in the release of anarchic energies. These we see directed

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## Southern California CEA

The fall meeting of the Southern California CEA, held at Claremont College in conjunction with a meeting of the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast, was devoted to an explication of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" by three critics of differing viewpoints. Janet Sawyer of Long Beach State College explicated the poem according to the linguistic methods of literary analysis developed by Archibald Hill; Basin Busacca of Occidental College treated the poem by the methods of the historical critic; John Rathbun of Los Angeles State College presented an explication in the mode of formalistic criticism. The explications were followed by discussion from the floor.

Byron Guyer  
Los Angeles State College

We would like to remind our readers that our columns are open to lively discussions of any topic connected with the teaching of English. If you disagree with something you see in our pages, wish to add to something, or have an original idea of your own, don't fail to let us hear from you.

The Managing Editor's gloomy comments on graduate study in the January issue aroused two written protests (Curtis Dahl, Wheaton, wrote "I'm glad I had absolutely no such experience in graduate school as you had. My teachers were all good as teachers and as scholars.") and a number of congratulations from recent Ph.D. recipients. The Managing Editor certainly had no intention of condemning all graduate work—he too had several excellent teachers in graduate school—but he did want to point out a trend which the CEA should watch and exert its influence to reverse. What were your experiences in graduate school? What do you think our organization can do to make graduate work in English a more meaningful experience for the student? Does Martin Kallich's article on the page facing this describe a move in the right direction?

L. E. H.

## Classroom Treatment of Reading Assignments in the Freshman Composition Course

Disillusionment with human nature when more or less large groups in a class fail to read the assignment; fatigue by week's end; disappointment that students do not see literary qualities in the assignment; concern, also, that their own writing would improve if we only had time and energy to devote to increased writing practice—these problems are contributing to the harassment of the overburdened composition teacher. They help to discredit composition classes among students and teachers alike, and they help explain why senior staff members gladly leave the freshman writing courses to graduate assistants.

My suggestion (perhaps already practiced, at least in part, by many) is to devote about one class period out of five to the writing of a twenty-minute paragraph on the reading assignment. Students learn—usually after only one dismally unsuccessful bluff or a single unprepared reading assignment—to do the reading with increasing depth of perception. They learn this because the papers are read aloud to the class immediately after they are written. Moreover, the paragraphs are graded before the students' very eyes—at least six or seven of them: after reading, each paper is dropped on one of five piles.

In my classes, I tell the students that

these short paragraphs "count" only one-fourth the value of an outside theme, since writing time is so extremely limited. I indicate these grades by 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, instead of the usual A, B, C, D, F, so that everyone is aware that they are not full grades. By semester's end, of course, six or eight of these grades can make a measurable difference, and the students know this. Moreover, there is operating here an even more powerful motive than grades, especially to the new freshman: immediate "publication" of his writing and possible recognition by his fellows.

The teacher, of course, learns to play this part by ear, to spare the honestly mistaken, to bear down on the sluggish, and to reward the virtuous. After only two or three of these periods, the ranks of the sinners become decimated, especially when the class is apprised neither of when a paragraph will be asked of them, nor of whose work will be read.

I have found that simply asking for a statement of the thesis of the reading assignment sometimes yields successful results. On other selections, the students can write good, unified paragraphs by answering one or two general questions, or by writing a clear definition of a key term. The requirement, however, should allow for different points of view, so that one will not be repeating precisely the same ideas when he reads each paragraph. I find that practice in framing questions usually eliminates the threatened monotony here. The more general the question, the more variety is found in the answers; one must merely avoid questions which the students can bluff against.

Certainly, the practice gained here is a direct attack on one of the serious problems confronting many English departments: the frequent complaints from other departments that students whom we pass in English cannot write successful essay examinations. Moreover, the serious attempts to pack paragraphs with details should help to improve themes; and the experience of hearing someone else read one's work immediately after it is written also is a valuable contribution to development of written prose rhythms.

The instructor benefits, also, by having the twenty-minute silence in which to grade that last theme in the weekly pile, by the psychological relief of showing up blatant errors just after they are committed, by grading at least a fourth of the class's work on the spot, and by having to use his voice for only thirty minutes. Grading of the remaining paragraphs does not take more than another half hour, since these are not marked to be revised, as is true with themes. Perhaps most valuable of all: attention does not flag—as it is apt to do at week's end—and some very practical, pointed teaching gets done.

Walter J. De Mordaunt  
New Mexico College of A. and M. A.



## A Course In The Preparation Of College Teachers Of Literature

In the last few years, the preparation of college teachers of literature has been a favorite topic for debate. In June, 1957, a committee of the College English Association issued a report recommending "practice, with guidance, for credit" and an informally organized and directed seminar. In such a course, senior teachers "will co-operate to demonstrate ways of teaching the novel, poetry, etc., and listen to and criticize presentations by graduate students." Last year, at the Minneapolis convention of the

NCTE the college section included a panel of departmental chairmen who discussed the problem with varying degrees of clarity and enthusiasm.

The speakers on the panel representing Vanderbilt, Manitoba, Chicago, and Michigan did not definitely mention the existence of such a course at their universities. A check of many catalogues also indicates that up to now the preparation or methods courses for graduate credit are not being given in appreciable numbers, although such courses may be concealed in non-credit informal seminars into which students are pressured.

The time for theoretical discussion of the pros and cons of this course is past. What is needed now is evaluation of the experiences of those teachers who have had an opportunity to offer it. We must see for ourselves what the course is like as we teach it and attempt honest and frank appraisals of its value.

The following outline of a course in the preparation of literature teachers is based on experience teaching graduate assistants working towards a master's degree in English. Entitled "Problems of Teaching Literature," the course is assigned three quarter credits (out of a total of 45 in the graduate program) and is required of all English graduate majors. All told, the class meets for 35 hours during the quarter.

### I.

The CEA Committee on Doctoral Studies rejects the need for a statement of aims and objectives. Exactly what harm such an introductory statement may do is difficult to conjecture. Obviously, because such a course has almost unlimited possibilities for variation, each teacher can present the material in his own way. Therefore an introductory statement of the course plan and goals reflecting the instructor's personal methodology contributes much to clarity and student security; and thus it becomes a useful (if elementary) teaching device.

The general objective may be briefly stated: to introduce students to the problems of teaching literature on the junior college level. The products of this course are skillful critic-teachers who can lead a discussion of a literary work of any type by means of properly oriented critical questions, and prepare exercises for a critical reading of literature. It will be understood, furthermore, that the reason for limiting the course to this objective is that student work will be directed to the preparation for teaching on the junior college level, the level of learning where the vast majority of undergraduates the novice teacher encounters are non-English majors.

The specific objectives are simply the means used to reach the general end, the skillful critic-teacher: (1) Students should be able to prepare a list of teaching materials on any literary topic. They should know which bibliographic sources of infor-

mation to consult for the efficient implementation of this task. (2) Students should become familiar with at least two superior textbooks (pragmatically defined as texts with a useful teaching or critical apparatus) in the various types of literature, as well as two textbooks of general literature (the introduction to literature textbooks). They should be able to evaluate the contents, to detect the approach or point of view, note the methods of teaching suggested, and indicate the virtues or defects of these books. (3) Students should become familiar to some extent with the periodicals that publish materials on the problems of teaching literature. They should make a special effort to find useful articles that will help them reach the general objective of the course.

### II.

To reach these general and specific objectives, readings in the textbooks, the pedagogical and occasionally the learned journals are assigned for each class meeting. For the convenience of the class, a bibliography has been prepared covering the following areas: teaching the types of literature, the English program, tests of appreciation, the preparation of college teachers of literature.

The students write abstracts of articles (which they submit to the instructor) and discuss in class what they have read. Then, after a few class hours of informal give and take based on the periodical literature, the textbooks are examined, one textbook being assigned to each student, if possible. An assessment in writing serves as the basis for further discussion of these books. By this time, the last step has been reached—the

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## PREPARATION OF COLLEGE TEACHERS

(Continued from p. 3)

students are ready for applications. For example, students are asked to prepare discussion questions on Shakespeare's sonnet "When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought."

These questions are then read before the assembled graduate students and evaluated for content and quality and general teachability. One measure of a question's success is its ability to stir up interest and generate discussion in a junior college literature class—true, a difficult measure to validate but one upon which there must be some speculation.

### III.

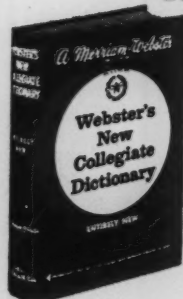
A term paper is required. The object of this paper is to demonstrate what it means to teach literature and to propagate literary values. Through this practical approach to literature the students have an opportunity to combine critical ingenuity with scholarship, and to test theories in a practical teaching situation.

The students are asked to prepare a critical discussion of a series of poems (or one long poem), or a few short stories, or one novel, or one play, or a biography. This discussion is modeled in large measure on the work of John Butler, whose excellent little teaching manual *Exercises in Literary Understanding* (Scott, Foresman, 1956) the students are asked to study carefully. Fred B. Millett's three books on *Reading Fiction*, *Drama*, and *Poetry* may also be recommended as models. Questions and possible answers to some of the more significant questions or perhaps to all, make up most of the term paper.

In this term paper, the students are simply asked to have a plan of attack, a liter-

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ary strategy, that represents their point of view, a method of procedure for the particular work that can be used efficiently in a classroom situation. This critical strategy is to be explained in the introduction.

Lastly, the term paper also includes a bibliography of useful materials—articles and books, as well as audio-visual aids.

### IV.

A final course examination is also given. Two weeks before examination time, the students are informed that the final examination will consist of a teaching problem based on Lytton Strachey's brief life of Thomas Arnold. This biography is chosen simply because it raises many intriguing questions concerning the art of biography. The students are permitted to do anything they think necessary to prepare for the examination and to bring and use their notes or other materials when writing it. They are reminded of the chief general objective of the course, and so they well know that they are expected to set up a teaching exercise in critical reading. They are also told that they must present pertinent bibliographical information—collateral readings of biographies that they may be asked to recommend to interested students, histories of biography and discussions of the art of biography, and, particularly, Strachey's contributions to life writing.

### V.

Throughout the course, the students are assigned a few elementary bibliographical problems based on Kennedy's *Concise Bibliography*. These exercises are designed to acquaint them with library resources, so that, should the need develop, they are able quickly and efficiently to prepare a useful selective bibliography on any literary topic. Naturally, because this bibliographical work is not intensive, descriptive or analytical, it is not meant to substitute for an advanced course in bibliography. It may be considered as a simple introduction to the problem of library research. Thus it may contribute in part to the realization of the general course objective.

Experience with graduate students on the master's level demonstrates the importance and need of some bibliographical work, despite the usual student objections to its uninspiring content.

### VI.

Admittedly, this program of study has certain imperfections and therefore will not satisfy some graduate teachers and students. Certainly, therefore, this outline must be modified according to student needs and teacher preferences.

Yet, despite criticism of this or that detail, it cannot be denied that as a whole a course in the preparation of college teachers of literature is valuable in that it gives students and teachers an opportunity to share a variety of ideas and thus to lay the groundwork for good teaching on all college levels. It will be found, however, that the course works best under the following conditions: (1) When one person is placed in sole charge of the program, taking full re-

sponsibility for planning the discussion and for inviting other instructors from time to time for assistance in the seminars. Such a person will tend to be methodical, and eventually he can become an efficient specialist. Philosophically, he must be open-minded so as to admit the possibility of a variety of pedagogical points of view. (2) When the students are relatively young and inexperienced. The students should be novices and therefore relatively unfamiliar with professional goals. It would be absurd to require a teaching course of an experienced and expert teacher. (3) When it accompanies or follows a course in the history or the principles of literary criticism. In effect, the content of this college course is applied criticism: a course in how to read a novel, play, poem, and biography. Hence it has a clearly defined relationship with literary theory, one that ought to be constantly explored. If students can be made aware of the way in which critical theory affects practice, their own teaching experience may deepen.

(4) When the students have the proper attitude. Perhaps it is wise to insure this attitude by giving the course for graduate credit. It will then be possible to demand carefully systematized and planned work from the students. Otherwise, the seminars are apt to degenerate into vacuous talk where shallow thinking is repeatedly and unprofitably shared to the disgust of all. (5) When a bibliography is prepared. Although there is a good deal of literature on teaching methods, much of it is insipid. A desperate need in this area is a high-quality annotated bibliography. Systematic reading in the best and most fruitful books and articles, which such a bibliography makes possible, will go far towards making the course a success, a truly valuable ex-

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perience for the novice.

Clearly, this vocational course can never supply enthusiasm or basic knowledge of subject matter—absolutely fundamental ingredients for superior teaching. On the other hand, it will certainly demonstrate in its limited fashion what a college literature teacher ought to know and do if he wishes to teach well on the lower undergraduate levels. Presumably, if such a teacher does his work effectively, he will then engender among his own students an appreciation and understanding of literary values that may restore literature to its rightful place of dignity in our culture.

Martin Kallich  
Northern Illinois Univ.

## SANE CRITICISM

Doris V. Falk's *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (Rutgers University Press, 1959) is at once the best extended study we have had of the foremost contributor to American dramatic literature and an example of a kind of sanity that has always been too rare in academic criticism. I hesitate, in fact, to apply the term "academic" to Miss Falk's book, though it had its origin as a doctoral dissertation at Cornell and its author is an Assistant Professor of English at Douglass College. Insofar as "academic criticism" connotes either the often dry-as-dust historical and biographical investigation of the older scholarship or the often drier-than-dust textual analysis of the aging New Criticism, Miss Falk's work can be called refreshingly non-academic.

Solid and acute in its implicit understanding of the history of tragic drama, of the vicissitudes of tragedy as a philosophic concept and a literary mode in our own time, of the contribution of Freudian and neo-Freudian psychology to the tragic self-awareness of modern man, this book avoids the pedantry of a parade of historical sources of philosophical and psychological questions in isolation from their specific embodiment in a dramatic structure. Profoundly aware of the ways in which O'Neill's agonizing personal experience shaped the tragic vision of his plays, from the early sea pieces through *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Miss Falk does not fall into the error of attempting to make biography "explain" or in any final way account for their substance and effect. On the other hand, she does not fall either into the currently even commoner error of treating the texts of the plays in *Vacuo*, out of the context of dramatic, theatrical, and intellectual history, of the characteristics of the society in which he lived, and of his own intellectual and emotional development.

Miss Falk's study of O'Neill is eclectic in the best sense; she analyzes and judges the plays in terms of their internal structure, of O'Neill's controlling vision, whereof each play is a varying embodiment, of their meaning in the context of classic tragic philosophy and contemporary psychoanalysis, and of their effect upon the theatrical audiences and readers for whom they are

intended. A book at once so sane and catholic in its critical method and so firm in its grasp of the outlines and the detailed textures of its material is rare in American criticism; it is almost unbelievably rare in American dramatic criticism; and I believe it is a book of unique value to the teacher and student of American drama.

The "tragic tension" of Miss Falk's title is one way of expressing O'Neill's controlling vision, a vision that is part of the attempt of tragic drama since Aeschylus to demonstrate order and justice in the seeming disorder and injustice of the human condition, as well as being a unique embodiment of a tortured twentieth-century artist's attempt to exorcise the demons that haunted his personal life and the uncentered, disintegrating society of which he was a part. On the one hand, the plays offer, as Miss Falk observes, "the classic twofold justification of the ways of God—or fate—to man; first, that suffering and the very need to explain and symbolize it are the fountainhead of human action and creativity; and second, that fated though he may be, man is ultimately a free and responsible agent, who brings most of his grief upon himself through pride." In her detailed treatment of the plays—particularly of those, like *Mourning Becomes Electra*, in which O'Neill consciously invokes and re-interprets the dualities of agony and affirmation, of grief and triumph, that underlie traditional tragic philosophy—she demonstrates his fundamental link with the great tragic artists of the past.

On the other hand, as Miss Falk also observes, "O'Neill was after all not a Greek, nor an Elizabethan, nor a nineteenth-century Romantic. As a twentieth-century man, he had to interpret the ancient idea in twentieth-century terms and symbols." In her analysis of O'Neill's use of "modern" materials—class conflict in *The Hairy Ape*,

racial antagonism in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, the conflicting claims of science and formal religion in *Dynamo* and *Days without End*—she offers sane and useful insights into his profound awareness of the peculiar contemporary forms of the human dilemma. And with her own sure knowledge of the revelations of Freud, Jung, and more recent psychological theorists, she is able to demonstrate not only O'Neill's theatrically powerful use of psychoanalytic symbolism, in plays like *The Great God Brown* and *Strange Interlude*, but the ways in which his search for an embodiment of the profound agonies of his family life produced the shattering "realism" of the explicitly autobiographical *Long Day's Journey*.

I should like to make clear that Miss Falk writes throughout not only with an understanding of tragic tradition, of the psychic dilemmas of twentieth-century man, and of O'Neill's own sensibility. She writes also with a sure grasp of the theatrical terms in which O'Neill embodied his emotion and insight, and with a sure sense of the distinction between the works—like *Electra*, *Long Day's Journey*, and *The Iceman Cometh*—in which the embodiment proved dramatically viable and convincing, and those—like *Days without End*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, and *A Touch of the Poet*—in which his dramatic touch faltered. The book is no less useful as a critical guide to the best work of a prolific dramatist than as an analysis of his output as a whole. It could, I think, be invaluable to both the professional and college group faced with the problem of staging an O'Neill play. And it is in all respects a work which serious teachers and students of American literature and modern drama can put gratefully on the uncrowded shelves of their library of enduringly useful criticism.

Seymour Rudin  
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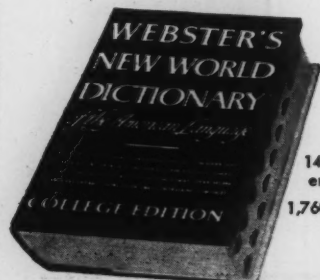
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## A WREATH FOR WEBSTER

(Continued from p. 1)

Webster wrote, "A grammar, to deserve the title, must contain a true explanation of the several species of words, a correct classification of them, and a development of the real principles of combination in the structure of sentences." Bestor's Council on Basic Education takes the Iowa department of public instruction to task for permitting, among other things, "Who do you want?"

We may sweep this criticism away with Webster's own broom: "In the use of *Who* as an interrogative there is an apparent deviation from regular construction, it being used without distinction of case, as, 'Who do you speak to?' 'Who is she married to?' 'Who is this reserved for?' 'Who was it made by?' This idiom is not merely colloquial; it is found in the writings of our best authors."

And further, he says, "These idioms, instead of being violations of grammatical rules, as our critics would make us believe, are wonderful proofs either of ingenuity in the framers of language or more probably of an irresistible propensity in men, independent of reasoning, to accommodate words to ideas and to express their ideas with the utmost brevity as well as force." And still further, in a comment that could stand today, "From a careful survey of the history of our language I have ascertained beyond any reasonable doubt that the English Grammars which have been published

within the last forty years have introduced more errors than they have corrected."

But let us clamber on the monument, where we are to lay our wreath in honor of Noah Webster. It is now late in the year of celebration, and others have been placed, the bands have played, the speakers have spoken, and the applause has been blown away on the winds of early winter. Here and there, among the already withered laurels, we find a green and verdant sprig of poison ivy.

Henry Steele Commager, writing a memorial for the *Saturday Review*, weaves a garland, "It was characteristic of Webster that he should associate the dawn of American glory with the publication of his own book . . . In 1783 Webster had few qualifications for either education or philology . . . It was a sound instinct that directed his energies into these fields, and held them there through a long life of distractions, ambitions, and conceits."

Having done so much for Noah Webster (before we can get there with our few kindly words), Commager then gives him credit for a parentage which close students of language must deny him—fatherhood of the American language. The true father of the American language, as we now know, was colonialism itself, not any colonial, however ambitious and busy.

The story can be seen in medieval Germany, where in the eastern provinces modern standard German came into being, in South Africa, where the Afrikaans language was born, as well as in many other places where immigrants of many dialects settled down together and worked out a common tongue.

Webster's own views should warn us against this kind of error. "New circumstances, new modes of life, new laws, new ideas of various kinds" would bring about "considerable differences between the American and the English language. . . . The general practice of a nation is the rule of propriety."

He found his authority in popular usage; like a barometer which records, but does not affect, the weather, Webster sensed the climate of linguistic development in America in regard to language—a genuinely scholarly sensitivity to the facts of language, widely known and widely understood, he did not achieve, 200 years after his birth it still does not exist.

The nonsense he wrestled with proved the stronger; it put him down, and arose

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the victor. It exists in a thousand shoddy and disreputable grammars; it lives in classroom and publishing house; it peers in the window of the schoolroom and keeps a Gestapo eye on the teacher. At this moment there exist for use in the schools of America exactly this many textbooks which are sufficiently in keeping with the facts of our language to testify that the spirit of Webster still walks his beloved land; for the elementary schools, none; for the secondary schools, one; for the freshman English classes in college, three. Let us lay our wreath with a sigh and a tear.

But let us lay it. We don't like Noah Webster's personality, and we credit him with what he could not have done. We deny him what he wished. All honor to him nevertheless! Let us say a word about what he did do, about what he could achieve.

According to Professor Harry Warfel, Webster's affectionate and careful biographer, we have reason to see Noah Webster as in effect the morning star of modern American linguistics. Let us remember that the morning star does not itself give light; it only forewarns of the rising sun, which may be long in coming. It is the sun that brings the light.

In Warfel's bicentennial lecture at Yale, he quotes the final two sentences of *A Philosophical and Practical Grammar*, by which Webster announces his intention in 1807 to move into a new field of research: "Before a language can be correctly understood, words must be traced to their

source, their radical significations explained, their mutations, contractions, and combinations developed. It is not the English language only whose history and principles are yet to be illustrated; but the grammars and dictionaries of all other languages, with which I have any acquaintance, must be revised and corrected before their elements and true constructions can be fully understood."

To place Webster's decision in perspective, Warfel reminds us of the invention in 1808 by Friedrich von Schlegel of the expression "comparative grammar." How far Webster was able to pursue this end does not concern us at the moment; he recognized what must be done and set about doing it, in a ten-year search into the heart of words. "It is not necessary to argue the point," Warfel says, "that the excellence of the definitions (in the dictionary of 1828), arose in no small degree from the solid basis of research on which they were based."

After reviewing the calumny to which Webster was subjected in his own time and later, even by those who inherited his name and the right to publish the Dictionary under it (to the extent that by 1909 almost all of Webster's original etymologies were eliminated) Warfel notes that in the 1934 edition of the *New International Dictionary* many of them were silently replaced. "A recent analysis of 1,500 entries revealed that at least one-third of them conform to Webster's original of 1828."

Who, then, is entitled to bring a wreath to Noah Webster's grave? It is not the Arthur Bestors of this world, who want to beat good writing into school children with the rod of bonehead grammar. It is not the Commagers, who praise with faint damns the wrong things for the wrong reasons. It is not the modern critics of literature, who skate around on the thin ice of meaning-interpretation, ignorant and contemptuous of the depths of language history and structure by which those meanings are maintained. It is not the textbook writers, who repeat with firmness the mythology of usage which Webster demolished a century and a half ago, and still pump from the dry well of Latin syntax all they know of the English sentence. It is not the literary scholars, who have nudged the disciplined study of language almost out of the English departments of the nation's colleges and universities.

It is only the children of the children of Leonard Bloomfield and Edward Sapir who,

absorbing the general picture of Webster as an erratic and quixotic student of language, more to be apologized for than honored, do not know him as their true progenitor. They, at least, accept the study of language as a necessary and rigorous intellectual discipline worthy of the educated mind and contributory to its full growth.

No more cozy than Webster himself to snuggle up to and no more easy than Webster to get along with, they have lifted American linguistics to an eminence equal to the eminence of any of the more currently popular sciences, such as atomic physics. And who may honestly, as schoolmasters, call Noah Webster "Master" more than that small number of teachers who believe that no instruction of language is worth anything unless it is grounded in facts ascertained by scholarship, and who struggle against the same demons of medievalism and unexamined authority against which Webster struggled?

In this, the chill December of our discontent, let this small company pay its genuine respects to Noah Webster, born two centuries ago, who saw that scholarship in language is the foundation of all good sense in the teaching of language use, and set about to provide it. These bring real honor to this anniversary, and a wreath without thorns—a laurel which will not wither.

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## TEACHING IN JAPAN

(Continued from p. 1)

Tokyo's three English speaking papers daily carry ads asking for teachers of conversation. The going pay, by the hour, for this tutoring is high; and most visiting Americans—like officers' or businessmen's wives—who have free time can tutor many individuals or groups. (I know one person who teaches fifty hours a week, and makes enough to maintain a car: this is, roughly, equal to being in a \$10,000 bracket in America.)

All very rosy, isn't it? No? Well, no, it is not, for many of these teachers, even in the colleges, have had neither training nor experience at teaching. Often a university's large classes of conversation, thirty in a class, allow a given student only one chance a week to speak a sentence, or one possibility in a month to hand in two or three pages of writing.

The matter is not entirely the fault of those who teach: one teacher of "conversation" who has been since the first of October working down through an essay of Galsworthy can not go faster because his students can not read faster. He believes that the pace is so leisurely that one very bright boy has memorized the whole essay from hearing the others read it.

Teachers in this group can and do conduct their classes in English. Some have very American accents and some have very English ones—and the poor student taking two or three English courses must vacillate between the two accents, as well as master (l, r and th) which are never in his own language.

What about the teacher of literature? He is in a position like none that I know of in America. Let me suggest some of the reasons why he is in trouble. In most cases,

shall we say 90%? he is Japanese, and has got what mastery of English he has by real effort. He can read English rather better than he can speak it, and he can even write it better than he can speak. He can't hear it very well, and he has little occasion to hear it except on the uninspired FEN (Far East Network—the Army, Air Corps, etc.) programs. The time difference between America and Japan cuts out live broadcasts.

He can see and hear all the American movies he wants, and records, too—but he's to be pardoned if he thinks they're entertainment first and literature second, or perhaps not at all. For material in English that he reads for pleasure or as literature, he will want the language simple, and the plot or characterization rather explicit than dependent on nuance. Have you ever tried to translate a joke? or explain the innuendo that is the theme of a Salinger short story? It can be done, but let us, for class use, find simpler material. And with not too much slang! For all slang has to be footnoted. Even Anderson or Hemingway need countless notes to make them clear.

Have these limitations suggested why Erksine Caldwell, in spite of macabre events and doubtful values, is more apt to be read than Katherine Anne Porter and Faulkner? And why there are great gaps in the history of either American Literature or English Literature?

Furthermore, in Japan, with its own wonderful Noh and Kabuki plays, the plays of Europe are totally and irrationally different. The plays of Shakespeare are taught—one play in a semester at the college level, but the concept of a theatre dependent on the surprise elements of narrative and the individualizing elements of character is foreign.

Japan has its own poetry of 17 and 31 syllables, and nearly one hundred non-academic magazines devoted to it—but this is not the poetry that America or England, or Europe either knows. So lyric poetry and drama are not easy to teach and when taught every analytical term and most of the values upon which motivation rests like love, shame, honor, justice, charity have to be defined.

Can the teacher of literature handle novels? He teachers people who, with industry, can read one novel in English in a month. They can not very well read faster than that; and they in their past have usually had novels called to their attention erratically, by the movies or by a chance remark of an instructor. It's a rare student who perseveres through the complete works of Thomas Wolfe. It's like an American undergraduate who promises himself to read Proust in French. So a teacher of literature can not expect his student to read many novels, or to have read many. And those that the student has read will certainly be an odd miscellany of reading.

An instructor tends, therefore, to work with simple, self-contained units, that are explicit rather than implicit, and that are brief. Consequently short stories are over-

used; history and essays are found more suitable than fiction or lyrics. Bertrand Russell and Commager win over Elizabeth Bowen and T. S. Eliot.

Those texts that are used and are available however are very good. They are also very cheap in comparison to similar editions in America. American textbooks here in Tokyo are exorbitantly high. Importers and booksellers between them manage to double the list price to the Japanese consumer. The choice of what foreign books are turned into texts is apparently that of the publisher—and this further makes erratic the total picture of either English or American literature. Out of the way Dreiser and Stevenson short stories are readily available, but to find a good, brief text of ten or twenty poems of a living American or English poet is hopeless. Living poets may want to collect royalties.

Although publishers do not canvass the needs of teachers, especially at the high school level, they are very close to the teaching profession, because nearly all teachers have their hand in at some editing, translating, or anthologizing; and holidays and week-ends are given over to this enterprise. The motives are not primarily scholarly. They are more mercenary.

Teaching is badly paid in Japan—worse than in America, and I have met scarcely a person who can limit his teaching to one institution. The usual thing is to teach at two, perhaps three. Where this is not so, educational radio programs, free-lance journalism, text-book chores as I mentioned before, or tutoring are almost necessary. This dispersal of energy means a dispersal of effect, no doubt; even so, there is little hope of changing it. One reason that this is so is that the social status of teachers is very high, on an equal with or above physicians for example, and it is not nibbled at by either anti-intellectualism or snide as it is in America. But Japanese teachers take too much of their pay in esteem and too little in cash.

Where the administrative staff fits into this picture is low down, somewhere in the left-hand corner. Heads of departments are elected, deans are elected, college presidents are elected. By gentlemen's agreements no one campaigns for these elections, or at least no one is supposed to. Once elected the honor is high, and the post is usually accepted for the honor and a little cash advantage, and from a sense of responsibility.

Most men when their term is over are willing to relinquish their posts with grace, while some in pursuit of a program or a principle want to continue. Even here as in America a man finds it hard to be a scholar and an administrator, although here an administrator is not a financial officer, or a public relations expert or perpetual responder to toastmasters of dinners for worthy causes. The bulk of the universities in the Tokyo area, notwithstanding famous and noble exceptions, are two or more colleges put together just after the war, all

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supported by national or other public funds and operating on minuscule budgets. The buildings are about as cosy or pleasant as abandoned warehouses. The libraries are grim. The athletic facilities are worse, far worse. Mostly the men change for track or baseball at the edge of the field. And if there are coaches or heads of the department of physical education, they are not among the administrative staff members.

Much of the idea behind this system is European. Each university, though it does not house its students, or care at all where they live, or what they do outside of class, —each university is a walled compound, and within its walls rules itself. For example once this fall a university student group, teachers included, drove policemen away from the compound when they tried to settle an on-campus fight. Later, to be sure, some students were expelled for the fight, but the university itself did the expelling.

Students are disciplined for other infractions, too, but they pretty much live by themselves. If the university has a dormitory or two, it may be 30 minutes away by street car. A second third of the students are in lodgings of their own choice—boarding houses where their supper and breakfast are part of their rent. The final third live with relatives: students come in to Tokyo from all over the country, but since 80 million people live in Japan, and 8 million live in the Tokyo area, nearly everyone has a kin of some degree to whom he can attach himself. Frequently by cash or gifts he pays his way here, too, but this other loyalty means that he may have more friends outside the university than he does within. He is non-the-less loyal to his school; he knows why he is at that particular school, what it can do for him, and what its distinguishing qualities are.

Entrance exams are stiff, but there is a lot of loafing after a student gets in. Examination periods are frantic, for grades are the only means of distinction that is recognized. "An all around campus leader" is non-existent in the Stephen Potter Gamesmanship of Japanese universities. Students are apt to study or at least read in their spare time: unlike American students they do read for pleasure. They also see movies, hear jazz, drink (though coffee is more sophisticated than beer—and more expensive), and play at many sports. Their range of sports is wider than in America: judo, sumo and medieval archery are as likely as boxing, swimming, skiing, skating—though not much hockey—and soccer and football. Tennis, lately, has had a new spurt of interest, especially with teen-age girls. Golf, mountain-climbing, bowling, cricket, track, and of course baseball are popular. On the roof of Tokyo's big central post office the clerks play baseball in the lunch hour, and at one university where I teach the center of the compound has three or four games going all the time: they begin at nine and go to four: as students get out of class early or see a professor will not arrive till late, the game goes on. It's

as quiet as it is active, and while it is played under the library windows, there is so little yelling that within the library you don't know the game exists.

In class students are quiet, too. I shall welcome again an American class where there is a possibility of an open difference of opinion. A student here is either too shy, too uncertain of his English, or too polite. To ask a question calls attention to the questioner. To ask a question implies the teacher has been careless in presenting his material. To ask a question implies that the student is stupid. In short, to ask a question is improper, if not indecent. This makes classes dull: they all turn into lectures—and class periods are usually two hours long! The students sit there bravely shivering in unheated class rooms, with Tokyo temperatures these days at 30 degrees and 40 degrees F., wide-eyed, amiable, agreeable and SILENT.

The bulk of these students look upon English in particular—both linguistics and literature—and upon their college training as a whole as a basis for a job. Their particular job, in a large company or in the government, has little relationship with their college training. A major in English, or history, or physics qualifies one to be a sub-manager of a chemical manufactory, if one's grades were high enough.

Some jobs are fed directly, of course—so that the technical and educational universities train for specific careers, and the very bright men or women in each class can be sure of a graduate-assistantship within their own department if they wish. All these jobs are sought for security, first, as advancement second. Government jobs of all kinds, and next jobs in big companies, banks, insurance firms, etc. are sought for. Some universities by their reputation or by the recommendation of particular professors can guarantee placement, but nobody gets any jobs of consequence without a degree. Sometimes a student, since this sort of thing is almost unregulated, takes six or seven years to get a four year degree with better grades and therefore hopefully a better job. And on the other end, two or three years may be spent in taking many exams to get into the college one prefers.

In this wonderful country there is, in spite of the obstacles, some very good criticism and scholarship; nearly all that is allied to American Literature has some contact with the American Literature Society of Japan. Let me cite as an example of current scholarly work the first volume of the publication of the Kyushu American Literature Society. Kyushu, for the benefit of you who are without an atlas, is the southernmost island of Japan's four. Its central city is Fukuoka, and there is the university about 400 miles west of Tokyo.

Like many of the prefectural universities, it publishes its own scholarly material, chiefly for the benefit of other scholars. This issue of Kyushu American Literature has six articles and nine book-reviews. The

(Please turn to p. 10)

### 3. Work from a suitable design.

Before beginning to compose something, gauge the nature and extent of the enterprise and work from a suitable design. (See under Chapter II, Rule 8.) Design informs even the simplest structure, whether of brick-and-steel or of prose. You raise a puppet from one sort of vision, a cathedral from another. This does not mean that you must sit with a blueprint always in front of you, merely that you had best anticipate what you are getting into. To compose a laundry list, a writer can work directly from the pile of soiled garments, ticking them off one by one. But to write a biography, the writer will need at least a rough scheme; he cannot plunge in blindly and start ticking off fact after fact about his man, lest he miss the forest for the trees and there be no end to his labors.

Sometimes, of course, impulse and emotion are more compelling than design. A deeply troubled person, composing a letter appealing for mercy or for love, had best not attempt to organize his emotions; his prose will have a better chance if he leaves his emotions in disarray, which he'll probably have to do anyway, since one's feelings do not usually lend themselves to rearrangement. But even the kind of writing that is essentially adventurous and impetuous will on examination be found to have a secret plan: Columbus didn't just sail, he sailed west, and the new world took shape from this simple, and we now think sensible, design.

### 4. Write with nouns and verbs.

Write with nouns and verbs, not with adjectives and adverbs. The adjective hasn't been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place.

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## TEACHING IN JAPAN

(Continued from p. 9)

book reviews are mostly of books or articles written by Japanese scholars on subjects of American Literature: on a study of *A Farewell to Arms*, on Stephen Crane, on Arthur Miller's theories of drama, but two reviews are about articles on English subjects "Keats and the Sea" and "Imagery in *A Tale of Two Cities*." Of the six articles themselves, look at this list: "An Essay on Tennessee Williams," "The Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," "Light in August," "Robert Penn Warren as a Short Story Writer," "F. O. Matthiessen and His Expatriation," "On the Philosophy of William James." The titles speak of a range and depth of interest that many an American college would envy, and the quality of those I read (but "Light in August" is in Japanese) is very good indeed.

It looks now as if Japan was aiming to be bi-lingual so far as any nation can achieve that result by the impulse of its schools and its intellectual groups. It is working to rectify the weakness everywhere evident in spoken English, and wherever the study of literature can in some degree contribute to a wider use of English, literature, either English literature or American literature is being used. There is much more interest in contemporary English and American literature than there is in 19th Century or 18th Century writing, but in all these areas there is not a great deal of interchange with the rest of the world. If it is difficult to know about and to see American scholarly writing, and it is, it is almost impossible to circulate similar work from Japan in America. This lack of interchange of ideas at the summit, so to speak, is only a part of the barrier that language makes. Japanese universities believe and are acting upon the assumption that once the barrier is removed Japan will inherit all that looks to her desirable from the west.

In this ambition I would wish her well. I can not forget, however, that between America and Canada, between America and England, between America and Africa, where the language barrier is not a fence but only a stick across the road, there has been a diminution rather than an increase of interest and understanding.

That is to say, educational systems, and what is finer, literary works of art grow out of a culture. An attempt to transplant or export them which does not carefully analyze the object to be transplanted is of doubtful importance. I hope that teaching in Japan has taught me to look again at poems and plays, novels and short stories and histories which from long familiarity I have taken somewhat for granted, and see in them anew what is distinctively American and what is enduringly valuable.

H. Leland Varley  
Fulbright Professor in Japan

## "DOCTOR ZHIVAGO"

(Continued from p. 1)

by a new, short-lived type—the born revolutionary, like Strelnikov, "entirely the manifestation of the will," who sets up his own hierarchy of ruthlessness, and when that is shattered must kill himself or be killed. But whether he really directs a patch of the revolution or is directed by a larger force, that is one of the moot issues of the book.

Another new class emerges, those who "adjust" and seem to make out all right, efficient, essentially uncommitted, alert, close-mouthed Samdeiatovs and Komarovskys (and Zhivago's half-brother Evgraf whose strange appearances at crucial points lend him a religious air).

And finally, we see the revolution grow into the furthest reaches of irrationality "when nothing was sacred any more," when dislocation and destruction of people occurs more casually than the mowing of a lawn. "Let us be mad if there is nothing but madness in life"—with this exclamation Zhivago and Lara, his mistress, try to withdraw into isolation only to find that disintegrate too.

And yet one would be mistaken to overlook some of the cleansing effects that Pasternak sees in the revolution. At least a vicious hypocrisy has been sloughed off, and if life has become machinery, there is no longer the ghastly mixture of soot and cosmetics on the faces of wealthy travellers that so nauseated the young Zhivago.

Such a large view of another "time of troubles" demands the form of a chronicle. Pasternak makes it up, or so it appears at first, of bits and pieces: people are there for brief, tortured moments, never to reappear, or more often to be momentarily reunited by the most unlikely of coincidences. One has the feeling of continuous movement, continuous re-arranging of particles, as though a gigantic new shape were forming itself. Pasternak's control of short scenes is extraordinary (one thinks of his poetry and his translations of plays), but this economy, this concentration makes for a vast profusion.

The problems that are raised by a novel in the form of a chronicle are, finally, what to exclude and how to maintain drama. Even though Zhivago and Lara gradually emerge as the hero and the heroine, there is altogether so much else, and so many links must necessarily be missing that there is a general diffuseness. One can notice

Pasternak's impatience and dissatisfaction with the form as he is led to provide, in effect, four conclusions, if Lara's separation from Zhivago and Strelnikov's death are taken as the logical climax of the action.

A chronicle by its very nature will remain inconclusive. If Zhivago goes to pieces on his return to Moscow, his poetry and his children—especially Tania, who is most like him—must continue from epilogue to appendix, and still leave it unfinished. Content betrays form, or, as Zhivago realizes, "art is a hidden, secret part of content." The formlessness of the novel is the price paid for its achieved grandeur. One may ask whether a novel can sustain such a succession of overwhelming, terrifying events. If a discursive description of dullness is dull, can chaos be put on paper with honesty and be anything but chaotic?

The fate of Zhivago himself provides some sort of spine to the story. Even so, it can be studied as mass perpetually overflowing its mold. Zhivago's very strength, which is made up of passivity, of a gift for taking infinite punishment, and of an intuitive understanding that his salvation lies in a highly individual creativity—this strength is also essentially undramatic. He is utterly certain that "nothing can be gained by brute force."

If the point is that he is no match for the engulfing "sea of troubles" and cannot "by opposing end them," if he is a "pygmy before the monstrous machine of the future," we know this from the very beginning and can only find it stated more and more explicitly and inevitably. On only one occasion is he moved to rebel against rebellion—when he is on the verge of killing Liberius, the leader of a quasi-revolutionary band and his abductor, for incessantly intoning slogans about "the betterment of the people."

Indeed, a seemingly minor but actually a most telling symptom of the hardening of the terror and of Zhivago's "inward" stand against it is the breakdown of language—a matter of special interest to English teachers. (Pasternak, however, does make it plain that a certain corruption of language existed before the revolution—still there was a margin of play.)

Now an officialese takes over—perhaps by accident, more likely by crude design—which harrasses people, invariably works to their disadvantage, expunges means for rational, imaginative thought, and finally coerces them into a mouthing of clichés and catchwords. In this debasement Zhi-



vago's writings and his occasional outbreaks into eloquent speech constitute an island of precarious integrity, an "inward music." His fits of writing resemble nothing so much as religious ecstasies.

The clarity with which he sees what is happening to language (this is more generally true: "he saw life as it was") leads him to oppose it in the only way he knows. Herein lies a tragic grandeur, for his need to preserve selfhood pushes him to the "outside" as now the forgotten, now the persecuted man. His poems are his legacy, and so is the quality of his life as it continues in the memory of a few survivors. In his daughter Tania's marvellous gift for story-telling we are also led to think his genius perpetuated. "Life," he said, "is the principle of self-renewal," and Pasternak persuades us that his hero has caught—despite the appearance of pointlessness—the soundings of that principle.

Not only his poetry, but his ability to give and accept love ("He was spared the humiliating, destructive punishment which failure to love is"), and his Tolstoyan rapture for the land provide stays against the dehumanizing that life around him has become. He does not succumb without a struggle, but it is a struggle in the privacy of his being, and although Pasternak would tell us that that is where the final victory is won, it is a struggle that like all Christian drama is foreordained to be undramatic.

If I keep harping on the novel's lack of drama, it is in part to question the validity

of that criterion and to seek the secret of Pasternak's success elsewhere. I suspect a study of his more specific devices would be highly rewarding. Just one example—his device of "metaphor by juxtaposition"; in a blinding snowstorm in Moscow Zhivago buys a paper, steps into a hallway to read about the Soviet assumption of power, encounters his mysterious half-brother whom he does not recognize, goes out, and, "without thinking twice," steals some wood.

Another approach that suggests itself is to see the book in relation to its great predecessors. Zhivago is a direct descendant of Dostoyevsky's "meek"—Prince Mishkin, Alyosha, and the reborn Raskolnikov of *Crime and Punishment's* epilogue—and claims even more paternity of the Tolstoyan hero. But these fascinating matters are perhaps outside the usual humanities course.

But very much within it is the novelist's concern with ideas. As a "novel of ideas," *Doctor Zhivago* exceeds the most exorbitant requirements. I have barely alluded to even the most obvious "themes" that infuse the novel. His discussions (direct and indirect) of religion, of death, of history, of love, etc. are of the very substance of the book. What can make the book so vital to young students is to note the striking correspondence between ideas and action—the very distinction between them grows spurious. Ideas mean action, ideas are made flesh. This is more true of the earlier parts of the book; Zhivago's realization that ideas no longer "count" gives him a clue to his own life and to those of others.

The political storm that the book has raised seems to me to lessen its immediate value somewhat, for the temptation (and clamor) is great "to make capital" of it as a weapon in the cold war. Needless to say, that would be doing it, and literature, a disservice. Even if it has fulfilled what must be the secret wish of all artists and all writers of all time—to ruffle the tempers of men in power—that properly concerns the political scientists or the propaganda officer who may wish to study the strategy by which a fictional commentary upon current events is "rendered into metaphor" of a past event, the revolution. It is a haunting, "rich" novel, which in a course with sufficient leisure could offer ventures and adventures. We need to know it better; it is clearly worth knowing better.

Alex Page

University of Massachusetts

## BEAT GENERATION

I have spoken with some knowledgeable students, including the president of our Literary Society—and their general conclusion is that while several—perhaps 35 out of 4500—strive heartily to emulate the Beat, very few (at most 5) in fact have attained Beat-ification. How come? I learn that 1) it takes intelligence, and 2) it takes cars (restricted here). There will probably be a panel on the Beat writers in the spring, and it will be very well-attended as was the Spillane panel a year or two ago.

There may be 5 fullfledged Beat on campus at present; I have yet to meet them personally (one I know may re-enter—after 2 years' absence—in the spring). The only student at present whom I can regard as moderately well-Beat just transferred to Miami University in Florida—where, I take it, he may find a greater number of jazz bands against whose music he may recite his poetry to a greater number of kindred souls. But even his poetry is not always hipster in diction (in conversation, in fact, he is unusually formal); he holds a remoter perspective on the beat use of language than Kerouac does. Still the student's aim is to smash some old coherences, perhaps all.

Though true Beats are almost necessarily absent, there are the 35 upperclassmen who want desperately to be thought beat; and the often-3rd-hand influence of the famed few in the land may be felt (or is this simply a parallel phenomenon, also symptomatic of a newstyle youth?) in a general sympathy—even in the 70 entering freshman whom I knew fairly well in the fall semester—for witnessing to some new Nada or other. Many teenagers are very conscious of all the anthropo-psycho-sociological lore about the difficulties their age group encounters in our culture. They gang up under selected banners of the lore ("We want independence; we want dependence, security, too"), and are very loyal both to their fellowly sufferings and to the gyrations by which they, as if exorcizing, preserve them. Their self-consciousness, class-consciousness, in language and gesture is akin to the beat stance: 'Hear my sloppy wail. Listen again and again. It is the voice of the future, with power.'

What is new about the Erater-the-old-order, this Oedipus impulse, is not so much its use as sanction of parts of the old order's anthropo-psycho-sociological dicta, but more its lack of personal spontaneity. Like the Beat's, the general aloppiness is forced and conscious, just as assured of a sympathetic audience, just as contemptuous of old styles.

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University of Mass.

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### Theme Criticism: An Experiment

One of the main difficulties in effective teaching of freshman composition is the fact that ordinarily after the student has returned his corrected themes he never sees them—or the criticism we have written upon them—again. Believing that retention by the student of his instructor's criticism of his papers is an important part of the pedagogy of teaching English composition, I devised a plan which I began using the past semester. Although a complete appraisal of its value is yet to be made, its use in one semester suggests that it has merit for both the student and the instructor.

This plan involves the use of a theme criticism sheet, Mimeographed on colored stock, with a carbon copy on ordinary white stock. The student receives the original when his theme is returned; the instructor keeps the white copy in his files. For the original, I chose a canary yellow paper of above-average durability, in the thought that the colored stock would be distinctive enough to stand out from the material that the student might have from other courses. Too, the bright yellow, attention-catching as it is, serves to remind the student of the sheet's existence.

Headed "Theme Criticism Sheet," the form has a space at the upper left for the first or second semester to be circled; a space at the upper right for the theme number, and below that, a space for the student's name. Below this preliminary data occurs the following statement: "This theme shows errors in the items marked below. Consult the appropriate sections in the handbook and make corrections on the theme itself. Keep this sheet for reference." Then, occupying the next third of the sheet and arranged in double columns, is a list of the most-often-used standard abbreviations for marking themes, with a brief explanation of their meaning (e.g. Rest., "Is the marked phrases or clause restrictive or nonrestrictive?") and the appropriate section in the handbook.

After reading and evaluating a theme, I circle the appropriate abbreviations on this sheet in red; then, under the heading "Comments upon Theme" which follows the

list of abbreviations, I write as detailed a comment as possible, carrying my comment over to the other side if necessary and finishing with the grade. The abbreviations of errors also are written in the margin of the theme itself, close by the errors involved.

The advantage of this procedure for the student is that it provides him with a running commentary on his work which he may study at any time. If a particular error occurs repeatedly, I call attention to that fact, which he may easily verify by looking over the criticisms of past themes. From the standpoint of the instructor, the advantage is that he has a file of his criticism and grades on every theme; thus, reviewing the work of a given student is simplified and speeded. Even though a student may mislay or fail to return a theme or many themes, the carbon copy of the criticism is available for the instructor. Since students are notoriously oblivious of the desirability of bring past themes with them to interviews, the instructor in such an instance can produce his file of carbons and discuss the student's work on the basis of the written criticisms and markings.

I have not found this procedure to add materially to the amount of time involved in grading themes. Circling the appropriate criticisms on the theme criticism sheet normally takes but a few seconds, and no more time is required to write the criticism on that sheet than to write it upon the theme itself. I have found that better alignment between carbon and original occurs when the two sheets are merely superimposed with a sheet of carbon paper between without the aid of a paper clip. A ball-point pen makes a clear, readable carbon, and the red of the ink against the yellow of the paper commands attention.

If I were to make any changes in this form, it would be to add a heading: **Corrections:** Made Satisfactorily Made Unsatisfactorily, as a continuing reminder that corrections are expected to be made with care. Obviously the student would never know for certain which of these had been checked on the instructor's copy, but he should be able to surmise. The addition of this would mean slightly more work, in that each carbon copy would have to be checked after the theme had come back; yet if an instructor takes the time to examine each theme after its return to ascertain the quality of the corrections, he is not likely to find the additional time required for placing a check mark on each of twenty-odd sheets a burdensome one.

John S. Phillipson  
Villanova University

William Dickey, Cornell University, is the winner in the 1958 Yale Series of Younger Poets. His book, *Of the Festivity*, will be published in April with a foreword by W. H. Auden, editor of the series. This will be the fifty-fifth volume in the series which was begun in 1919.

### MIDDLEMARCH

George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is generally acknowledged by modern critics to be the greatest of the Victorian novels. While conforming to their general pattern, it rises above this pattern by its skillful use of psychological analysis, a characteristic which has won for it a wider influence upon subsequent novelists than any other work of the period.

In teaching *Middlemarch*, then, one may consider it from two points of view: its greatness as a work of art, and its relationships with other novels of its own period and with those of later periods. Obviously, the first of these aspects of the novel is by far the more important; to it most of the time spent in teaching the book should be devoted. Perhaps the most interesting way to approach *Middlemarch* as a great novel is through the medium of class discussion, given impetus and direction by the instructor's supplying a set of study questions to be used in conjunction with the student's reading of the book. Its historical importance, on the other hand, might best be dealt with in lectures.

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